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**Department of Health & Social Services**

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**NEWS RELEASE**



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## **State Public Health Recommending Targeted Use of Flu Vaccine**

**Anchorage, Alaska - - -** The Alaska Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) today recommended that all Alaska health-care providers target their supplies of influenza vaccine to persons at highest risk of severe complications from the flu. The recommendation was prompted by today's announcement that Chiron, the manufacturer of approximately half of the flu vaccine used in the United States, will be unable to release any flu vaccine this year. Today, British regulators suspended the manufacturing license of the company for three months and denied their ability to distribute vaccine anywhere in the world. Chiron's manufacturing plant is located in the United Kingdom.

The loss of the Chiron flu vaccine supply clearly poses a serious challenge to Alaska's vaccine supply during the upcoming flu season. In response to this news, DHSS Division of Public Health (DPH) Director Richard Mandsager has announced that Alaska providers are being asked to restrict use of available vaccine to persons at highest risk for complications from the flu.

"Our immediate focus will be on making sure that the vaccine supply we have reaches those who are most vulnerable," Mandsager said. "We will have to rely on voluntary actions of the public and health care providers to ensure that available influenza vaccine for this season is limited to those at highest risk for complications from flu and health care workers who provide their care."

The Division of Public Health is announcing that vaccine use should be limited to persons 65 years of age and older, persons of any age with chronic health conditions such as diabetes and asthma or with weakened immune systems, residents of nursing homes and long term care facilities, children 6 months through 23 months of age, women who will be pregnant during the influenza season, health care workers involved in direct patient care, and out-of-home caregivers of infants younger than 6 months of age.

"In previous years when we have experienced a flu vaccine shortage, Alaskans have been very supportive of our decision to limit it to high-risk persons, and we anticipate receiving the same support for our decisions this year," Mandsager continued.

Because no Chiron vaccine had been released to the general public, there will be no need for a vaccine recall. The flu vaccine currently available in providers' offices is from a different manufacturer.

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This year the state had ordered 100,000 doses of the routinely used vaccine. Forty thousand (40,000) of these doses were from Chiron, and the remaining 60,000 were from Aventis. The majority of the Aventis vaccine has been received and distributed to Alaska health-care providers. In addition, the state ordered 25,000 doses of the infant formulation from Aventis. Many private providers also purchase vaccine in addition to the state supply.

Epidemiologists with the Division of Public Health are also encouraging people to take several simple precautions to help guard against getting or transmitting the flu, including: covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, washing your hands frequently and thoroughly, and if you have flu-like symptoms, staying home to avoid infecting others.

People in the high-risk categories should contact their health care provider if they experience flu-like symptoms.

Influenza is a viral respiratory illness marked by the sudden onset of fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. The illness is spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, sending the highly contagious virus into the air.

### **Additional online information about influenza:**

Alaska Division of Public Health, Section of Epidemiology

[www.epi.alaska.gov](http://www.epi.alaska.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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